



ASHMOLE MS 209

A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

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Ashmole MS 209: a Case of Mistaken Identity

Susan Ward

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The Ashmolean collection of manuscripts in the Bodleian library was catalogued and published as ‘A Descriptive, Analytical, and Critical Catalogue of the Manuscripts bequeathed unto the University of Oxford by Elias Ashmole Esq. M.D. F.R.S. Windsor Herald, also of some additional MSS. contributed by Kingsley, Lhuyd, Borlase, and others. By William Henry Black, one of the Assistant Keepers of the Public Records. Oxford at the University Press. M.DCCC.XLV’. It is an old document, but the library is currently undertaking the digitization of this catalogue which might bring it up to date in its descriptive capacity. An error in the description of two volumes, made by Edward Lhuyd (1659/60-1709), has led to a continuing misapprehension of the authorship of those manuscripts. In this review the authorship of one of them is proved externally and confirmed internally as will be shown.

One of the manuscripts in question is MS Ashmole 209, described as:

A folio volume, containing four MSS. written on paper.

I. Two hundred and seven Select Figures set on Horary Questions, with the astrological judgement given on each, and the actual event or consequence; by William Lilly. f. 1-104b

These are very neatly drawn (out of his practice-books and papers) and discoursed on: there is one figure with its judgement on each page (except 95b, which is blank), and ff. 105-30 contain only the frame of the figures stamped, but not filled up.¹

Clearly, anything produced by such a well-known figure of the seventeenth century as William Lilly (1602-1681) is worthy of the attention of any scholar of the early modern period, particularly of the years of the British civil wars. However, it is something of a surprise to find that the manuscript is not the work of the great astrologer at all, but of a much lesser astrologer.

Jeffrey Le Neve (1579-1653) was an astrologer and medical practitioner. He began life in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk and became a merchant and

¹ William Henry Black, ‘A Descriptive, Analytical, and Critical Catalogue of the Manuscripts bequeathed unto the University of Oxford by Elias Ashmole Esq. M.D. F.R.S. Windsor Herald, also of some additional MSS. contributed by Kingsley, Lhuyd, Borlase, and others.’ (Oxford, 1845), p. 170.

alderman. He was a civic worthy of some standing until conflict with the corporation forced him to leave in 1626. For the thirteen years prior to this he had continued his uncle's astrological almanac. He left for Belgium and obtained his M.D. at Franacker, returning to set up at London as astrologer and physician.²

The manuscript MS Ashmole 400 is described as 'Vindicta astrologiae iudiciariae, a Doctore Galfrido Le Neve Anglice conscripta, Latine vero reddita per Beveridgium'; the Latin version of Le Neve's book of figures. The description goes on: 'This book was erroneously intitled by Lhuyd, "Gulielmi Lilly praxis astrologica:" but it is the "Latin copy" of Le Neve's figures mentioned by Ashmole in his note on that work (No. 418) as written by the hand of Mr Beveridge'. So, the error was repeated with this manuscript.³

The noted manuscript 418: 'A large folio volume, fairly written, and thus intitled on the second leaf. "*Vindicta Astrologiae Iudiciariae*, or the Vindication of Judicial Astrology... Approved, confirmed, and illustrated by 600 examples of experimentall observations, wherein is expressed the names and habitations of those people nominated in this work... Collected, composed, and published by Geffrey Le-Neve, Doctor of Phisicke..." The description goes on to note that there are only 500 figures not 600 in this copy.⁴ The rest of the description goes on to replicate the manuscript found in the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) that does have all 600 figures.⁵

Manuscript 209 is of 207 figures written up in much the same way as described at manuscript 418 and that can be seen in the UCLA complete version; a sample of which is reproduced here.

This plus the UCLA manuscript suggest that there were at least three copies in English, 209 and 418 being partial. It is possible that there was a fourth since John Gadbury (1627-1704) reports having seen a manuscript of 400 figures, although that may have been a work-in-progress.⁶

The UCLA manuscript is complete with pages added by later owners, one being Peter Le Neve (1661-1729). He was a herald and an antiquary, and it is because of this latter interest that this manuscript survives. He was made Norroy king of arms in 1704. On his death a sale of his books and

² Bernard Capp, 'Le Neve [Neve], Jeffrey (1579-1653)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/19917>

³ Black, 'A Descriptive, Analytical, and Critical Catalogue of the Manuscripts', p. 317.

⁴ Black, 'A Descriptive, Analytical, and Critical Catalogue of the Manuscripts', p. 324.

⁵ UCLA, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, '*Vindicia astrologiæ iudiciariæ*, [sic] or, The vindication of iudiciarie astrologie'. No folios or page numbers. <https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/21198/n1js6w/>

⁶ John Gadbury, *Collectio Geniturarum* (London, 1672), p. 178.

manuscripts was held over twelve days consisting of 2000 printed books and 1252 manuscripts, of which this was almost certainly one.⁷ He seems not to have been closely related to Jeffrey Le Neve.

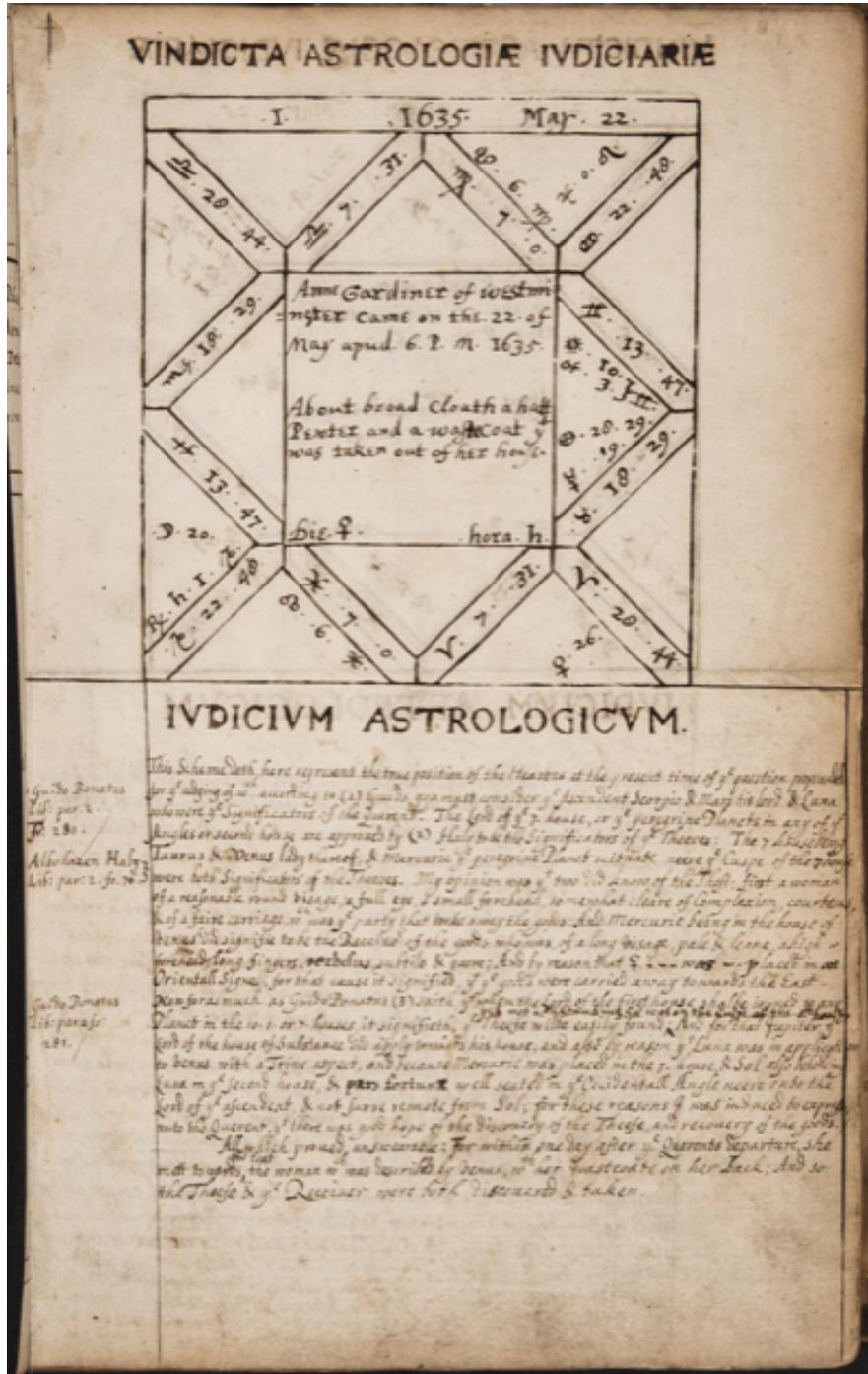


Figure 1: Example folio from MS 209.

The library record gives this information about the manuscript:

⁷ Thomas Woodcock, 'Le Neve, Peter (1661-1729)' <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/16440>

Armorial bookplate of William Constable, FRS & FAS on front paste-down endpaper; ownership inscriptions by Peter Le Neve on title page and inserted manuscript leaf at page 2; "Bought at Peter Le Neve sale" on title page, perhaps in the hand of Cuthbert Constable.

As noted on the inserted page that quotes Gadbury's assessment of Le Neve, Peter Le Neve writes that he owned the manuscript in 1725.⁸

The library also shows William Constable (1721-1791), possibly the son of Cuthbert, as being an owner because his armorial bookplate is inside the front cover. But he was not old enough to be involved in the sale of Peter Le Neve's books and papers, which might be why Cuthbert Constable (c. 1680-1747) is listed as a contributor; he was old enough to have bought items at the sale.

Following the transcription of the section from Gadbury, there is an astrological figure of a question. The question is 'Money Conceal'd of a Kinsman's deceased. Nov: 23. 1682. 3h. 45' PM.' There follows astrological notation regarding the aspects of the moon, much as would be expected from an experienced practitioner. Outside of the figure, the question is noted as 'A Question Propounded by an uncle for his Kinsmans conceal'd estate, he being now deceased.' There follows a judgement of the figure which concludes that there was gold hidden in the house and that the questioner should immediately seek a warrant to allow him to search the upper rooms.

There then follows Jeffrey Le Neve's preface and, although it remains undated, presumably awaiting a printing date, he provides his address as 'from my house in the Parish of St Clement Danes without Temple Barre London'. He seems to have been a neighbour of Lilly who also lived in that parish following his return to London in 1641.⁹

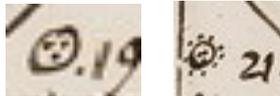
Aside from the evidence provided by the catalogue, in a first examination it becomes clear very quickly that this is not Lilly's work. When compared to some of Lilly's published and unpublished work, there are some differences in handwriting, phrasing, vocabulary, and astrological glyphs.

⁸ Gadbury, *Collectio Geniturarum*, pp. 178-179.

⁹ William Lilly, 'A Collection of Ancient and Moderne Prophetes Concerning these Present Times, with Modest Observations Thereon' (London, 1645), 'To The Reader', no pagination.

so on of ...
 The Donation of the Vicaridge, is in the gift of
 the Grays of Langly, unto whom they pay yearly,
 I ^{think} in the Vicar, as I am informed ~~to~~ per an.
 very lately, some charitable Citizens, have ~~surpassed~~
 our third portion of the Tythe, and given it for
 maintenance of a preaching minister, and it now
 of the value per. an. of about 50^s.
 There have been 2. Hermitages in this parish,
 the last Hermit was well remembered by one
 Tho: Cook a very antient inhabitant: whom my
 younger years acquainted mee herewith.
 William. Lilly

Figure 2: example of Lilly's handwriting from his autobiography, MS Ashm. 421.



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Figures 3 and 4: Examples of ornamentation of the sun's glyphs that is rarely found in Lilly's published or unpublished work.

Time notation is crucial in astrology, although there is some flexibility, but to find an astrologer noting the time in such broad terms as, 'inter 4 et 5 p.m.' and 'apud 5 p.m.' is surprising.¹⁰ These kinds of approximations with the time are not to be found anywhere in William Lilly's work.¹¹ A major feature of the charts themselves is the dating that makes it very difficult to ascribe them to Lilly. They are dated from 1635 to 1642 each giving the name and address of the client (a feature that is completely absent in all of Lilly's known work except sometimes in the broadest of terms), which is always in London. In 1636, Lilly left London for Hersham, Middlesex having suffered from 'hypochondriack melancholly' and he did not return until 1641.

so that in the year 1635, my infirmity continuing and my acquaintance increasing, I resolved to live in the country, and in March and Aprill 1636 removed my goods unto Hersham where I now live, and in May my person, where I continued until 1641:¹²

Even if he were returning to London from time to time, as he may well have been, there is a great deal of work in this one manuscript to have been carried out during that time. Indeed, as mentioned, 209 is only a part of the

¹⁰ MS Ashm. 209, f. 13.

¹¹ William Lilly, *Christian Astrology* (London, 1647), 'Propheticall Merline' (London, 1644), 'Starry Messenger' (London, 1644), MSS Ashm. 210 and 420 as examples.

¹² MS Ashm. 421, f. 194.

final version which was of 600 horary figures. Noting that these figures were supposed to be of a quality suitable for publishing, averaging at two questions per week for six years most of which Lilly was living in the country ‘no notice being taken who, or what I was’.¹³

Lilly himself provides the last argument in this review of the external evidence:

There was also one Jeffery Neve at this tyme student in Phisick and Astrology, hee had formerly been a merchant in Yarmouth and Mayor of the town, but failing in estate went into the Low Countrys, and at Franecker took the degree of Doctor of Phisick; [Margin note: ‘I have seen his Diploma’] hee had some little smattering in Astrology, could resolve a question of Theft, or love question, something of sickness; a very grave person, laborious, and honest; of tall stature and comely featured; hee died of late yeares almost in the very street, near Tower Hill.¹⁴

Clearly, Lilly knew him well and held him in some regard as a person if not as an astrologer. Later, he comments more interestingly for this review as follows:

Doctor Neve had intention of printing 200 verified questions, desired my approbation of them ere they went to the press, I first would see them, and then give testimony, when I had perused the first forty, I corrected 30 of them, would read over no more, I showed him how erroneous they wear, desired his emendation of the rest, which he performed not; these are now in R. Sanders custody, bought by him either of his soon or of a stationer. [WL] ‘But first offered to be sold to me for 20^s. When M^r. Saunders died I bought them of his son for less. EA’ [Elias Ashmole’s note in the manuscript.]¹⁵

Which version of the manuscript Lilly had ‘perused’ is unknown, but as noted earlier in the catalogue, Ashmole had made notes on manuscript 400 of 400 figures, presumably it is this version to which his note in Lilly’s autobiography refers. Both manuscripts 400 and 418 need to be reviewed in order to decide on this and to see if Lilly’s corrections can be found. Although, there are a number of alterations made to the judgements of the last approximately thirty figures in the UCLA manuscript.

These are the most obvious pieces of evidence for the argument that manuscript 209 is not William Lilly’s work. But moving on to the manuscript itself confirms this finding with internal evidence.

As part of this early examination, the marginalia were closely scanned for information relating to the author and one name arose once or twice,

¹³ MS Ashm. 421, f. 194.

¹⁴ MS Ashm. 421, f. 191.

¹⁵ MS Ashm. 421, f. 191.

that of a Miles Beveridge mentioned in the catalogue at volume 400 as the translator into Latin of the manuscript.¹⁶

Noting that this copy refers to 400 figures and again that a number of folios had been left blank, it answers a question that arose from a margin note: ‘entered in the first booke./ The judgement formerly entered in the first booke of judgments.’¹⁷ So, the ‘first booke’ was perhaps the Latin translation by Beveridge. Further, that Elias Ashmole (1617-1692) has commented on the manuscript, although there seems no way of knowing when this actually took place, does bring the matter closer to Lilly since they were friends. Ashmole left London in 1643, after the outbreak of the first civil war at the end of the previous year. He was at Oxford with King Charles I in 1644, but there is no information referring to his knowing Le Neve at that time.¹⁸ Ashmole returned to London in 1646 after the fall of Oxford. However, it is likely that his note was written after he had acquired the manuscripts from the son of Richard Saunders (1613-1675), thus sometime soon after Saunders’s death.¹⁹

It is possible that there had been an intention to produce the book in volumes; the figures in manuscript 209 are numbered consecutively to 115, when the numbering reverts to 1 and continues to 98. Indeed, this manuscript appears to be a working copy in some ways with marginalia such as, ‘This figure must be entered in the place of the 4 figure before.’ and ‘This figure must stand in the next side following.’²⁰ A comparison of manuscript 209 with that of UCLA revealed that every figure in 209 was accounted for in the UCLA manuscript of the full 600 figures, although with different numbering which produced a chronological order.

However, perhaps the most impressive evidence linking these two manuscripts is found in 209 itself. Folio 1 presents a question raised by one Lancelot Gun about his oxen; the figure is numbered 17. The margin note states that it is the ‘Last figure’, and the same figure and judgement can be found in the UCLA manuscript numbered 599, not quite the last perhaps but near enough to make the point.

Le Neve’s collection of horary judgements is, according to Lilly, flawed in their astrological content, however, as Bernard Capp notes in his article for the *ODNB*, the manuscript provides detailed information about Le Neve’s clients, their social status, employment or business, and address. This kind of detail is seldom available and would make an interesting study of its own.

¹⁶ Capp, ‘Le Neve [Neve], Jeffrey (1579-1653)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁷ MS Ashm. 209, f. 22.

¹⁸ C.H. Josten, ed., *Elias Ashmole, (1617-1692): His Autobiographical and Historical Notes, his Correspondence, and Other Contemporary Sources Relating to his Life and Work*, 4 vols, (Oxford, 1966), vol I, C.H. Josten, ‘Biographical Introduction’, pp. 19-20.

¹⁹ MS Ashm. 421, f. 191.

²⁰ MS Ashm. 209, ff. 61 and 68.

However, the conclusion has to be that all of the manuscripts noted here are versions of, what appears to be, the final, print-ready version in the Clark Library of UCLA, and that manuscript 209 is to be found in its entirety in the latter manuscript albeit numbered differently. This therefore confirms that neither manuscript 209 nor 400 is the work of William Lilly.

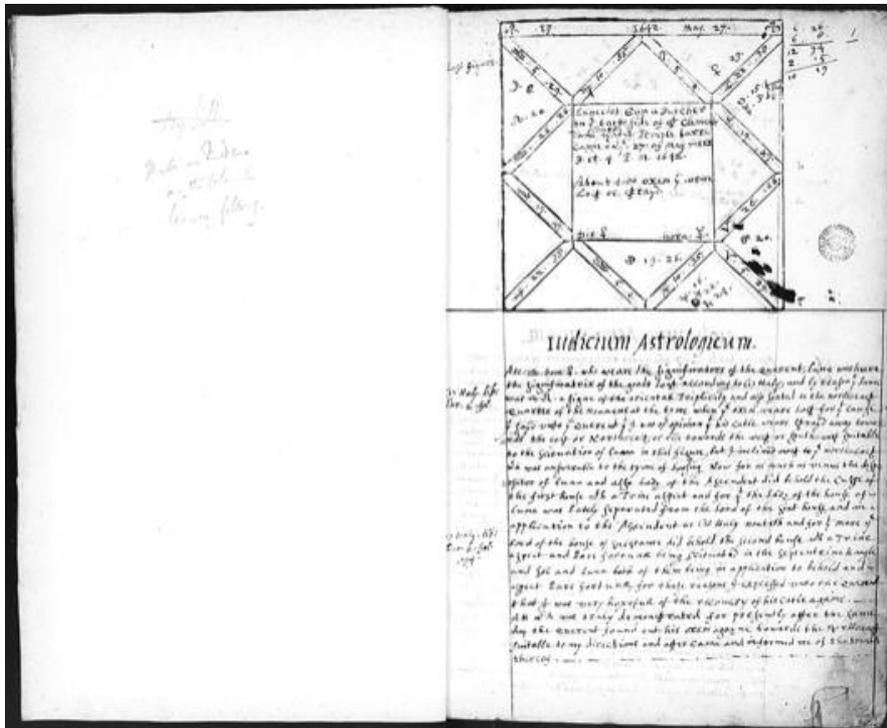


Figure 5: MS Ashm. 209, f. 1

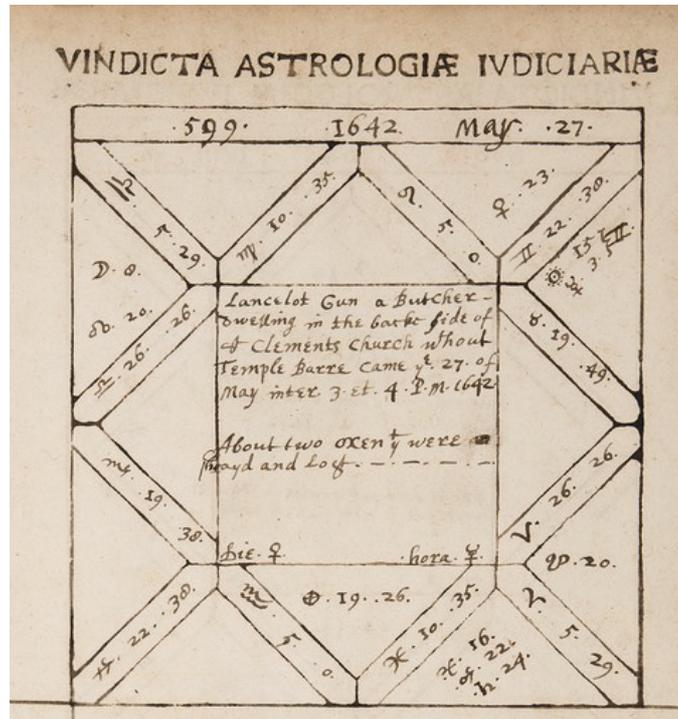


Figure 6: UCLA 599